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How far Dars-e-Nizami is Attuned to the Modern Era: Some Observation

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In the early and middle centuries, the Islamic sciences enjoyed the highest level of priority among Muslims. Islamic history is witness to a large number of scholastic centers throughout Muslim world. The central Masjid in every city and town housed an Islamic institute that would host hundreds of knowledge seekers. The legacy of knowledge that was initiated by the Qur'an and the Prophet continued and spread far and wide, finding homes in the great learning hubs of Baghdad, Balkh, Nishapur, Herat, Isfahan, Basra, Merv, Amul, Mosul, Damascus, Cairo, Sanaa and Delhi. These centers of continued legacy not only preserved the knowledge, but also led and guided Muslims in their times of hardship. These educational centers were later termed as *Madrasah* (Plural *Madaris*).

In India the history of Madaris is very old. However, the number of Madaris has enormously increased during the post-independence period. In the past, these institutions have played an important role in imparting Islamic education, increasing the literacy, and strengthening the Islamic consciousness and most importantly, providing training to the prospective civil servants. In the pre-colonial days, a graduate equipped with mathematics, logic, philosophy and the other secular sciences, along with the religious ones had better chances to get employment in the imperial civil service or in the courts of the regional rulers and nobles. Historically, Islamic education was used to strengthen and maintain "specific discourses of power," consequently curriculum was designed accordingly to fulfill the needs of those who were in power. At first, during Akbar's reign (1556-1605) the Madrasah curriculum was redesigned by Fatah Allah

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Shirazi (d.1589), a great Iranian scholar of Akbar's court¹. Being himself a great scholar of rational sciences, Shirazi put emphasis on the rational sciences (m'aqulat) by adding more books on logic, philosophy, mysticism and scholasticism. On the other hand, the tradition of teaching religious sciences also flourished. This tradition was nourished by Sheikh Ahmed Sirhandi (d.1624), Sheikh Abdul Haq Muhadith Dehlvi (d.1641), Maulana Abdul Rahim (d.1718) and his son Shah Wali Ullah (d.1762)².

Darse Nizami

Later a new curriculum was formulated keeping in mind the requirements of the time by Mulla Nizamudin Sihalwi (d.1748), who was contemporary of Hazrat Shah Waliullah, for Madrasah at Farangi Mahal.³ Later this curriculum was named after him as Darse Nizami. It became a landmark in the history of Muslim education in India and was adopted by most of the Sunni madaris of the Subcontinent. Around 10 Million students in 30000 Madaris were studying this syllabus around the world.

Some amendments were introduced, particularly after the second half of the nineteenth century. Darse Nizami was meant to train administrators and to fulfill the need of 'increasingly sophisticated and complex bureaucratic system' of India. Dars, itself, did not demand rote learning, though it preserved the century's old tradition of oral communication and the memorization of texts. Being tilted in favor of M'aqulat, the curriculum developed the habit of self thinking.⁴ The number of books on sciences, which strengthened the power of thinking such as scholasticism, mathematics, philosophy and logic, was higher than any other branch of learning such as Tafsir (exegesis of the Quran), Hadith (tradition of Prophet Muhammad), and Fiqh (Islamic jurisprudence). Dars was basically a standardized method of learning rather than a list of books taught to the students. The fundamental feature of this curriculum was its emphasis on widening the mental horizon and develops the habit of reading and research and analytical skills rather than rote learning, in order to develop masterly or

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two relatively difficult books on a discipline. However their mental ability was put to scrutinize before initiating them into that process. After completing the study they were able to comprehend other books on that discipline also. In order to promote logic and philosophy in the madaris along with religious sciences, the Dars was heavily loaded with the books on grammar and syntax, to develop language skill in Arabic, the language of the textbooks and a means for the transmission of the heritage of the Islamic tradition. All these subjects which include logic, philosophy, grammar or syntax were considered 'Ulum-e-'aliya, instrumental sciences.⁵

Life sketch of Mulla Nizmuddin

Mulla Nizamuddin was an originator of a great system which had far reaching effect upon the Muslim system of education. It would be proper to give a brief sketch of his life and character.

Born in Sihali, a town 28 miles away from Lucknow, Mulla Nizamuddin was an illustrious son of an equally illustrious father Mulla Qutubddin Shaheed. Mulla Qutubddin was a theologian of great repute and saintly disposition and had an institution of his own which attracted a large number of students from neighboring districts. When Mulla Nizamuddin was only thirteen years old, Mulla Qutubddin, who came of Ansari family, was brutally done to death by some miscreants belonging to Uthmani family which was in long feud with the Ansaris.⁶ It was a great blow to the family indeed, but since the eldest son of the deceased was in the service of Emperor Aurangzeb, he was able to secure a royal edict from the Emperor, According by severe punishment was inflicted upon the men responsible for the murder of Mulla Qutubuddin and a spacious house in Fargangi Mahal (Lucknow) was allotted to the family of the deceased. There the whole of the Mulla's family migrated from Sihali and made it its permanent home.⁷

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Mulla Nizamuddin received his early education from his father and after his death he studied at Dewa and Banaras. At Dewa he was the pupil of Mulla Daniyal Chaurasi who had studied under Mulla Abdus Salam and who is credited to have written notes on Tawdih, Talwih and Baidawi which are considered as classics. According to Mawlana Manazir Ahsan Gilani the main reason for predominance of secular subjects in Darse Nizami is that Mulla Nizamuddin was the student of Mawlana Chaurasi who had himself received education from Mulla 'Abdus Salam, an authority on secular learning.⁸ It was at Banaras that he completed his education under the well known scholar Hafiz Amanullah Banarasi, a pupil of his father. But there is another version of Mulla's education. According to the author of 'Subhatul Mirjan' by Ghulam Ali Azad, he studied at different places in Eastern U.P. and it was at Lucknow that he completed his education under Sheikh Ghulam Naqshbandi Lucknawi.⁹

After completion of education Mulla Nizammuddin assumed the seat of his father and started his own institution which, within a short time, became a great seat of theological learning in Eastern U.P.

Mulla Nizamuddin led a quiet, simple and contented life, disdainful of riches and men of riches alike. Despite his great talents and learning which could have easily bought him a comfortable life he preferred a life of poverty and drudgery to that of opulence and luxury. Unlike other Ulama (scholars), he was the very embodiment of humility which would not allow him to enter into a discussion or debate with anyone on any controversial point. If anyone disagreed with his point of view he did not push it any further, rather he would remain silent.

Mulla Nizamuddin has written commentaries and notes on certain books which are scholarly and are of high standard. But he has not been the author of an independent book on any subject taught in the Madaris. Nizamuddin's reputation does not lie in the fact that he was author of so many commentaries, and notes, but because of the fact that

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he introduced a system of education which even after more than two hundred years, is still followed in most of the Madaris of today in the sub continent of India and Pakistan.¹⁰ During the period of the later Mughals a time was when this Darse Nizami proved an effective system of traditional education. At that time since there was hardly any difference between religious and secular learning, this Dars was able to produce not only theologians and divines but also men of letters, businessmen and the administrators for running the machinery of the government of the day. Undoubtedly it served the educational interests of the Muslim society well. With the advent of the British rule it was no longer as useful as it used to be and required certain changes to meet new demands of the changed society. But these institutions refused to recognize the urgings of the new society and clung hard to their old ways. Now in independent India the need for their reorientation is all the greater. Their reorientation can be achieved only when drastic changes are introduced into Dars.

Latest version of Darse Nizami

Below is given the latest version of Darse Nizami which is adopted by Deobandi Madaris.

Tafsir (exegesis)

Tafsir al-Jalalain

Anwar al-Tanzil

Al-Kashshafan Haqaiq al-Tanzil

Usul al-tafsir (Methods of exegesis)

Fauz al-kabir fi usul al-Tafsir

Hadith (Prophetic traditions)

Al-Bukhari

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Muslim

Al-Muwatta

Al-Tirmidhi

Abu Daud

Al-Nasai

IbnIbn Majah

Mishkat Al-Masabih

Usul al-Hadith (Methods of Prophetic traditions)

Sharh Nukhbat al-Fikr

Fiqh (Islamic law)

Sharh Wiqaya

Al-Hidayah

Khulasa Kaidani

Kitab Muniyat al-Musalli wa Ghuniyat

Al-Mubtadi

Nural-idah

Mukhtasar al-Quduri

Kanz al-Daqaiq

Al-Faraaid al-Sirajiyah

Usul al-fiqh (Basis of Islamic law)

Nural-anwar

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Al-Tawdih fi hall jawamid al-Tanqih

Al-Talwih ila kashf haqaiq al-Tanqih

MusallamMusallam al-Thubut

Husami al-Muntakhab fi Usui al-Madhahib

Usul al-Shashi

Sarf (Grammarr)

Mizan al-Sarf

Munshaib

Sarf-e Mir

Panganj

Dastur al-Mubtadi

Ilm al-Sigha

Fusul-e Akbari

Zarawi or Uthmaniya

Al-Tasrif al-Zanjani or al-Tasrif al-izzi

SarfBahai

Marah al-Ar wah

Nahw (Syntax)

Nahw-e Mir

Kitab al-Awamil al-Miat or Miat amil

Sharh Miat amil

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Hidayat al-Nahw

Al-Kafiya fil Nahw

Al-Fawaid al-diyaiya or Sharh Jami

Tashil al-Kafiya

Hashiya Sharh Jami

Adab (Literature)

Nafahat al-yaman

Saba Muallaqat

Diwan al-Mutanabbi

Maqamat al-Hariri

Al-Hamasa

Mufid al-Talibin

Nafahat al-Arab

Mantiq (Logic)

Al-Risala al Sughra fil Mantiq

Al-Risala al Kubra fil Mantiq

Kitab al-Lsaghiji

Mirqat

Mizan al-Mantiq

Tahdhib fi ilm al-mantiq

Sharh al-Risala al-Shamsiya or Qutbi

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Mir Qutbi

Sharh Sullam al-Ulum or Mulla Hasan

Sharh Sullam Hamid Ullah

Sharh Sullam Qadi Mubarak or al-Munhiya

Al-Hashiya al-Zahidiya al-Qutbiya or Risala Mir Zahid

Philosophy

Sharh Hidayat al-Hikmat or Maybudhi

Sadra

Shams al Bazigha

Al-Hidayah al Saidiya

Theology

Sharh Aqaid al-Nasafi

Al-Hashiya ala Sharh al-Aqaid or Khayali

Mir Zahid

Sharh Mawaqif or Sharh al-lzzi

Mathematical sciences

Tahrir usul al-handasa li Uqlidis

Khulasat al-Hisab

Astronomy

Tasrih fi Tashrih al-Aflak

Sharh Chaghmini

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Metrics

Arud al-Miftah

Rhetoric

Mukhtasar al-Maani

Talkhis al-Miftah

Mutawwal

Debate

Al-Adab al-Rashidiya fi ilm al-Munazara

A Critical view on the Dars

There is no doubt that Darse Nizami when it was introduced was in keeping with the needs of the day and met adequately the demands of that period. However, there was, at that time, no distinction between spiritual and secular education. Administrators, businessmen, poets and writers were all suitably equipped for their respective fields through this system of education.

Today, the political and social structure, economic and monetary conditions, trade and industry, national and international situation as everything else has undergone a revolutionary change. Innumerable new problems have arisen. The life has become more complicated than it was in the past.

It is therefore necessary that this syllabus should also be reoriented. Thus, with a view to improve the efficiency of Madaris the following points may be considered:

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> Tafsir: In the Darse Nizami Tafsir has not received the attention it deserves. The only books prescribed under the subject were Jalalain of Jalaluddin Mahalli and Jalaluddin Suyuti and a portion of Baidhavi. There should be some improvements in the syllabus of the subject. There is need to have more books on Quran and Tafsir. There is also a need to acquaint the students with recent commentaries on the Quran which reflects that, despite of vast scientific and technical changes in the world the basic principles enunciated by Quran are good and competent to all times.

> Hadith: In order to fully appreciate the significance of Hadith, it is essential not only to study the Hadith but also Usul al-Hadith and the history of development and codification of Hadith.

> Philosophy and logic are the two subjects to which our Madaris seemed to be very much attached. In Darse Nizami we find that there were more books prescribed on these subjects than on Hadith and Tafsir. It is also fact that the philosophy as taught in these Madaris is the ancient Greek philosophy which is interpreted by Muslim philosophers, and is very old. Books used in philosophy and logic, were written in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries. Medicine is taught through an eleventh-century text that is still considered an authentic study of human anatomy and pathology. In purely religious subjects, the books used date back to the seventeenth century at the latest and the eleventh century at the earliest. Books prescribed for astronomy, mathematics, and grammar are more than five to seven-hundred-year-old texts¹¹. It simply ignores the modern developments in these subjects which cannot be dismissed as worthless. So it may be suggested that it would be quite appropriate if modern literature is also included in the syllabus.

> History: Madaris did not give any importance to the teaching of history, although historiography was a developed science in the Muslim countries in the middle ages. A few books on Islamic history are prescribed and these too do not conform to the

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principles of History writings. According to Maulana Shibli Nomani, books of History were prescribed in the syllabus of Madaris, not because of their historical importance, but because of the fact that they were considered as models of Prose.¹² Therefore it is needed to reorientation of the text books of History in the context of the Modern historiography techniques.

> Arabic Literature: In the teaching of Arabic there is a great defect that no adequate attention is paid to its linguistic side. Alongside modern Arabic should be taught through the direct methods. It is good that it is now being increasingly realized that undue emphasis upon grammar is not conducive to the learning of the language. So it is necessary to decrease the inefficient books of grammar from the Arabic Syllabus.

> A comparative study of the different faiths of India.

> The mid-1960s also witnessed important curriculum reforms in the madaris. Among other things, the most important reform in major madaris was the introduction of the English language and other modern subjects, especially in the fields of comparative religion, history, and law. Some prominent madaris in Punjab linked their courses of studies with the general education curriculum, thus enabling their students to acquire degrees from the government schools and colleges and obtain jobs in the "secular" sector also. The younger generation of prominent ulema families was especially encouraged to acquire modern (English) education to prepare them to deal with the state authorities on the one hand, and with their modernist and fundamentalist adversaries on the other. This paid enormous dividends during the Bhutto and Zia periods. Maulana Taqi Usmani (son of Maulana Mufti Muhammed Shafi) of Karachi, Pir Karam Shah of Sarghoda, and Maulana Samiul Haq (son of Maulana Abdual Haq) of Akora Khatak and others among their cohorts, by dint of their exposure to modern education and facility with the English language besides, of course, their traditional madaris education were appointed as federal Shariat Court judges, and as members of

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the Council of Islamic Ideology and many other newly created Islamic institutions, commissions, and committees during the Zia period.¹³ It is a good Idea for Madaris students to get connected with mainstream education which will be helpful in securing their career. Therefore it is suggested that English should be include as compulsory subject along with other modern subjects, like Economics, Political Science, Psychology and Law etc.

> Students of Madaris display a lack of general knowledge. To understand the present movements and to find solutions to the problems of modern life, subjects like geography, current history, general knowledge etc should be included in the syllabus.

> We cannot shut our eyes to the achievements of the natural science. If we do, we are doing injustice not to ourselves but to our future generations. Our Ulama must realize that they cannot ignore the science for long. Sooner or later they will have to acknowledge the importance of science in the life. As such there is an urgent need that a course in the general science should find a way in the syllabus.

> Sports and Games: There is also scope for improvement in matters of physical' exercise, excursion and sports and games. Improvements in this direction will help students achieve coordination between their body and brain.

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